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## ‘Sport of the future’? Padel’s Miami boom augurs U.S. expansion

### Miami, United States

Padel, the racket sport that originated among the elites of Latin America and Spain, has exploded in popularity in Miami. Fans say it will conquer the rest of the United States, and the world.

A cross between tennis and squash, played on courts surrounded by glass walls, the sport has quickly become a key part of the Florida lifestyle, adopted first by Miami’s Latino community and now spreading to clubs, parks and luxury

hotels.

Entrepreneurs have rushed to build courts, hoping to cash in on a buzzy new hobby that is usually played by teams of two, and offers the health benefits of physical exercise with a chance

to socialize and make new acquaintances.

Florida accounts for 40 per cent of all padel courts in the US. Construction has doubled over the past year-and-a-half nationwide, though the country’s approximately 770 courts still lag behind Argentina (7,000) or Mexico (2,500). “The United States is a new market, but the only thing padel needs is time. Wherever the sport takes root, it thrives,” said Argentine star Fernando Belasteguín, widely considered the greatest player in the sport’s history. “It is the sport of the future... It’s easy to learn, fun, and social,” he told AFP, with unwavering optimism. “It’s played by both men and women -- anyone from a five-year-old child to an 85-year-old grandfather can play.”

### - Olympic bid -

Padel shares many similarities with tennis, including its scoring system and the layout of the court -- al-

though the playing surface is roughly one-third the size. Aside from the key fact that players can hit the balls off any of the glass walls, there are other differences. For instance, serves are always underarm.

Padel has been taken up by stars across the sporting spectrum.

Footage on social media of soccer icons Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, as well as Formula 1 driver Max Verstappen, playing padel have boosted the game.

Some have even opened their own branded padel centers, including tennis great Rafael Nadal in Spain, and football icons Zinedine Zidane in France and Neymar in Brazil.

Brazil is a key expansion target, with an estimated 600,000 players.

“I’ve never had so many students,” said Jefferson Velho, a coach at Sao Paulo’s Santo Padel Academy, which uses converted former futsal courts. □



People play a padel match at a court in Sao Paulo, Brazil on March 27, 2026.



## Houston, we have a problem ... with the toilet

### Houston, United States

After a successful trip around the Moon, everything has been going smoothly on the Orion spacecraft's journey back to Earth – except for the \$23 million toilet, which has gotten clogged.

The system designed to flush wastewater into space is malfunctioning, and NASA believes that a chemical reaction in the urine treatment system is the culprit. The fecal disposal system, in a separate conduit, is working properly.

Astronaut Christina Koch said the so-called Universal Waste Management System was giving off "a burning heater smell."

Rick Henfling, flight director for the Artemis II mission, stressed Tuesday that "the toilet remains operational. The challenge that we're working through is evacuating the wastewater tank," he said. "So we're having to fall back to some other alternate means."

Under Plan B, the four astronauts are using personal reusable containers called "collapsible contingency urine disposal devices."

The toilet problem was reported just hours after lift-off from Cape Canaveral, Florida. Koch adjusted the system's controls, restarted



NASA's Artemis II flight director Jeff Radigan (C), speaks next to Artemis II Vehicle Manager Branelle Rodriguez (R) and NASA's associate administrator Amit Kshatriya (L), during a status briefing of the Artemis II crewed lunar mission, on April 9, 2026, at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas.

them with the help of mission control, and that appeared to resolve the issue. "I'm proud to call myself a space plumber," Koch said in her first briefing from the spacecraft, which is to splash down in the Pacific Ocean on Friday. She called the toilet "probably the most important piece of equipment on board."

However, the problem has persisted. The astronauts are unable to flush the wastewater into space.

The issue has been a constant topic of discussion at press conferences held at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas.

This is the same center that in 1970 received astronaut Jack Swigert's message: "Houston, we've had a problem," after an oxygen tank explosion aborted Apollo 13's Moon landing, starting a harrowing emergency that eventually brought those three astronauts back to Earth safely.

### - Chemicals, not ice -

NASA initially thought the toilet problem might be due to freezing in the filters. But Henfling said that the problem was not ice. The spacecraft has been rotated to face the sun to "bake off any ice" and heaters have been activated, "and we still see blockage," he said.

"The latest theory is related to some of the chemistry that goes into ensuring that

the wastewater doesn't develop any biofilms," or microorganisms, he said. The chemical reaction may be generating some debris that's "getting clogged in a filter."

The toilet on board Orion is similar to the one on the International Space Station, but this is the first time it has been used on a crewed deep-space mission.

The Apollo astronauts didn't have a toilet and used special bags for waste.

On the Orion spacecraft, which is five meters in diameter and a little over three meters high, the toilet is located beneath the floor – the only place on board where the astronauts can be alone.

The cramped toilet space is very noisy inside, so they must protect their ears. It has suction systems to compensate for microgravity.

Feces are placed in disposable bags that compact and will be brought back to Earth.

Lori Glaze, associate administrator of NASA's Exploration Systems Development Mission Directorate, said that "as soon as we get this down on the ground, we'll be able to get inside and we will get to the root" of the problem. □

## National Parks open gates for historic "America 250" celebration

The jagged peaks of the Tetons and the moss-draped silence of the Everglades are calling, and in 2026, the gates are swinging wider than ever before. As the United States prepares for the "America 250" celebration—marking two and a half centuries since the signing of the Declaration of Independence—the National Park Service (NPS) has announced a historic expansion of its free entrance program.

This year, the NPS is offering eight designated free entrance days, a strategic move to ensure that the nation's "crown jewels" are accessible to every citizen, regardless of their zip code or bank balance. From the red rocks of Utah's "Mighty Five" to the historic battle-

fields of Virginia, the message is clear: these lands belong to the people, and the celebration of America's story starts in the wild. The timing is particularly motivational for the "road trip" generation. With international travel costs fluctuating, many Americans are turning their gaze inward, rediscovering the vast diversity of their own backyard. The "America 250" initiative isn't just a birthday party; it is a nationwide invitation to reconnect with the physical soul of the country.

"Our parks are the living pages of American history," says National Park Service Director Charles Sams.

"By removing the financial barrier for these spe-

cial days, we are inviting families to create their own history within these landscapes. Whether it's your first time seeing a bison in Yellowstone or a return to the Great Smoky Mountains, these experiences define us as a nation."

The impact of this program extends far beyond the park boundaries. Local "gateway communities"—the small towns that sit at the entrances of these parks—are bracing for a surge in "patriotic tourism." In towns like Mariposa, California, and Springdale, Utah, local businesses are launching "250 Specials," offering discounts to travelers who visit during the free windows. This synergy between the federal government and local commerce



American bison graze at Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming, on June 12, 2019.

is providing a significant economic boost to rural America.

Furthermore, the NPS has launched a digital "National Park Passport: 250 Edition." This mobile app allows visitors to collect vir-

tual stamps and share their stories of "finding home" in the wild. It's a modern twist on a classic tradition, designed to engage a younger, more tech-savvy audience in the stewardship of our natural resources. □



## The "snackpacking" revolution hits U.S. cities

The sun was just beginning to crest over the brick-lined streets of Charleston, South Carolina, but the line at a small, unassuming window on Spring Street was already ten people deep. These weren't diners waiting for a white-tablecloth brunch; they were "snackpackers," the vanguard of a 2026 travel movement that is fundamentally changing how Americans consume both calories and culture.

For decades, the high-water mark of a successful vacation was the elusive dinner reservation at a five-star establishment. However, a post-pandemic shift toward authenticity, combined with a desire for more nimble, budget-conscious exploration, has birthed a new phenomenon. Snackpacking is the art of skipping the heavy, three-course sit-down meal in favor of a day-long, nomadic journey through a city's culinary soul, one small bite at a time.

The concept is simple: instead of spending \$100 and two hours in a single darkened dining room, travelers are spending that same budget over six hours at six different family-owned businesses. From



sourdough starter tours in the Mission District of San Francisco to boudin ball crawls in the humid corridors of New Orleans, the "big meal" is being dismantled and redistributed into the hands of local artisans. "When you sit in a restaurant for two hours, you see a curated menu and a waiter's uniform," says Elena Rios, a veteran food guide based in Austin, Texas. "When you snackpack, you see the city. You see the mural next to the taco truck. You talk to the grandmother who has been pressing tortillas for forty years. You aren't just a customer; you are

part of the neighborhood's daily rhythm." This trend is more than just a win for the adventurous palate; it is a vital economic engine for the "little guy." In cities like Portland and Nashville, micro-vendors and food stalls are reporting a 30% increase in daytime foot traffic from tourists. By spreading their spending across multiple vendors, travelers are ensuring that their vacation dollars support a broader cross-section of the community. It is travel with a conscience, wrapped in a paper napkin.

The psychological benefits are equally compelling. In an era of "decision fatigue," the low-stakes nature of the snackpacking lifestyle is a breath of fresh air. If a \$6 skewer of grilled meat doesn't hit the mark, the traveler hasn't ruined their evening or emptied their wallet. The next discovery is always just a block away, turning a standard sight-seeing day into a high-reward scavenger hunt.

As we move into the peak travel season of 2026, the data suggests this isn't a passing fad. Major travel apps have begun integrated "snack maps," and

boutique hotels are swapping their formal dining rooms for rotating "pop-up" kiosks featuring local chefs. The American traveler is no longer content to be a passive observer behind a windowpane; they want to be on the pavement, moving, tasting, and connecting.

The true beauty of the movement lies in its accessibility. It requires no dress code, no advance booking, and no elite status. It only requires a pair of comfortable walking shoes and a healthy dose of curiosity. Whether it's a warm pretzel in a Philadelphia alley or a fresh peach from a Georgia roadside stand, these small moments of flavor are proving to be the most durable memories of the modern journey.

Snackpacking stands as a powerful testament to the American spirit of exploration. It reminds us that the heart of a destination isn't found in its most expensive buildings, but in the vibrant, bustling, and delicious hands of the people who call it home. This summer, don't just book a table—take a walk. The best seat in the city might just be a park bench with a paper bag and a story to tell. □



While most airport construction projects are met with groans of frustration, the city of Portland has achieved the impossible: a terminal that travelers actually want to visit early. As of April 2026, the newly completed main terminal at Portland International Airport (PDX) is being hailed as a global masterpiece of "biophilic" design, proving that the stress of modern

travel can be cured by a return to nature. The centerpiece of the \$2 billion "PDX Next" project is a massive nine-acre wooden roof. Sourced entirely from sustainably managed forests within a 300-mile radius—including small family-owned timber lands and tribal nations—the structure is a soaring tribute to the Pacific Northwest's heritage. The lattice-work sky-

## Nature takes flight: Portland's new timber terminal becomes a sanctuary for the modern traveler

lights filter sunlight through the beams, creating a "dappled forest floor" effect that immediately lowers the heart rate of hurried commuters.

"Airports are usually glass and steel boxes designed for machines," says project lead Sarah Jenkins. "We wanted to build a place for people. When you walk in here, you smell the Douglas fir and see the living trees. You feel grounded before you ever leave the ground."

The terminal functions less like a transit hub and more like a vibrant city square. The interior features "park-like" pods filled with native

Oregon greenery, permanent lounge seating that mimics a backyard deck, and a curated selection of local shops that require no "airport markup." In a motivational move for the local economy, the airport has maintained its "street pricing" policy, ensuring a cup of Stumptown coffee costs the same at the gate as it does downtown.

Industry experts are taking note. Earlier this week, PDX was awarded the 2026 "Architecture for Wellbeing" prize, with judges citing its ability to reduce passenger cortisol levels through design. It serves as a powerful

reminder that our infrastructure can—and should—reflect the natural beauty of the regions they serve.

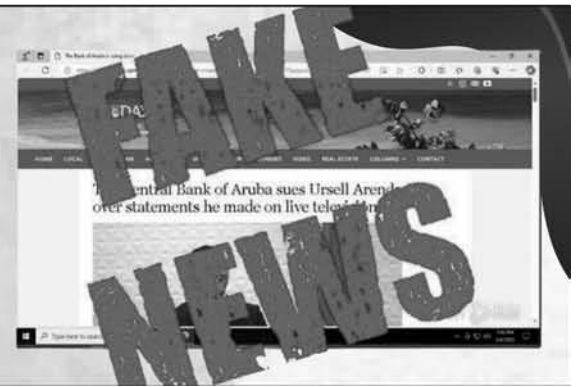
For the vacationer, the message is clear: the journey is just as important as the destination. Whether you are departing for a summer getaway or returning home to the Rose City, the new PDX terminal offers a rare moment of peace in a fast-paced world. It turns out that the secret to better travel wasn't more digital screens or faster moving walkways—it was a little bit of wood, a lot of light, and a deep breath of fresh air. □



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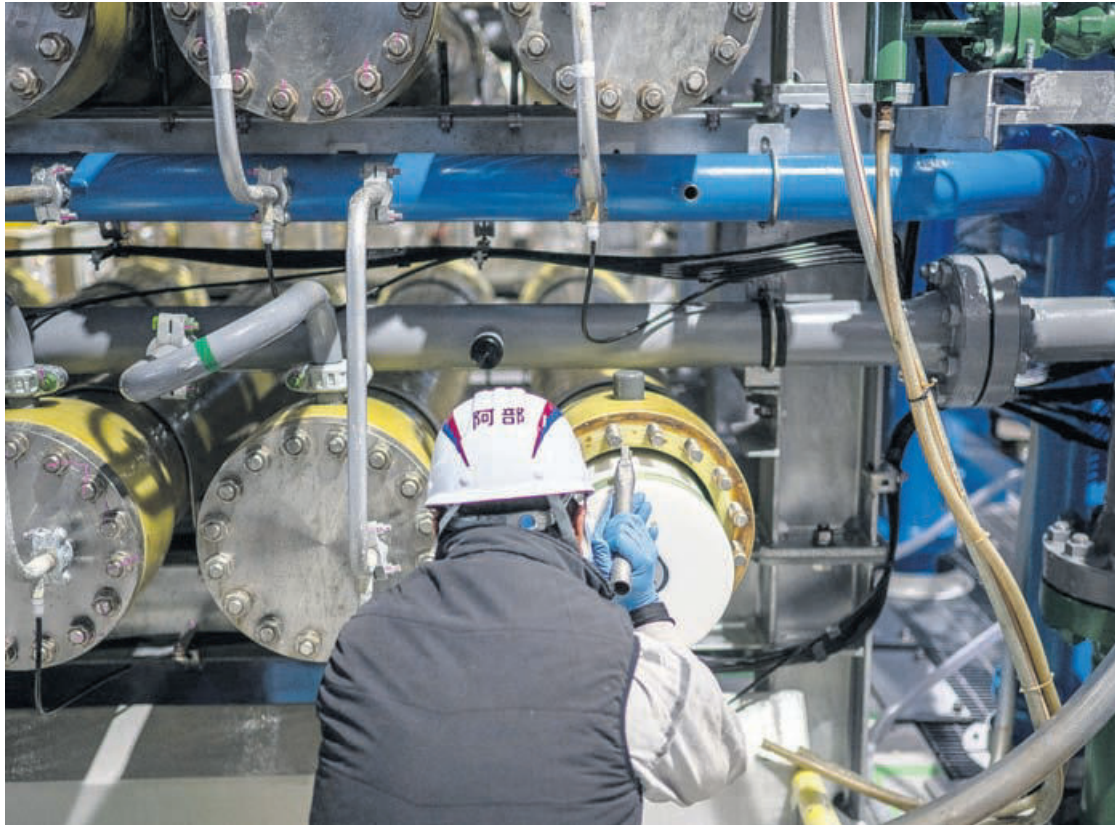
## Waste water to clean energy: Japanese engineers harness the power of osmosis

### Fukuoka, Japan

A Japanese water plant is harnessing the natural process of osmosis to generate renewable energy that could one day become a common power source.

The possibility of generating power from osmosis when water molecules pass from a less salty solution to a more salty one has long been known.

But actually generating energy from that has proved more complicated, in part due the difficulty of designing the membrane through which the molecules pass. Engineers in the city of Fukuoka and their private partners think they might have cracked it, and have opened what is only the world's second osmotic power plant.



This picture taken on January 14, 2026 shows a staff member changing a part of the osmosis membrane facilities at Sea Water Desalination Plant in Fukuoka.

It generates power from the transfer of molecules between treated sewage water and concentrated seawater, a waste product from a desalination plant in the city.

"If osmotic power generation technology advances to the point where it can be practically used with ordinary seawater... this, in turn, would represent a major contribution to efforts against global warming," said Kenji Hirokawa, manager at Sea Water Desalination Plant.

Osmosis is familiar to most people. It is the process that, for example, causes water to seep out of a cucumber or eggplant when sprinkled with salt.

Water molecules move across membranes from an area of low solution concentration to an area of higher concentrated solution.

At scale, that movement can be significant enough to turn a turbine and thereby generate electricity.

### - Desalination solution -

Fukuoka is particularly well-placed to benefit from the technology because it has a readily available source of extremely salty water the brine leftover from desalination.

With no major rivers to sufficiently source its water, the city and wider Fukuoka region of 2.6 million people have relied on a major desalination plant to produce drinking water since 2005. That left the city with large quantities of concentrated saline waste water to deal with.

Ordinarily it is diluted and released back to the sea. Previous attempts to find alternatives, including salt making, failed to gain traction.

Then engineering firm Kyowakiden Industry approached the city about harnessing the salty wastewater for osmotic power.

"When our company rolls this out as a business, we aim to build plants roughly five to 10 times the scale of this current facility," said Tetsuro Ueyama, research and development manager at the Nagasaki-based company.

In Fukuoka's system, a generator is attached to a local desalination plant located near a sewage treatment facility.

It draws in highly saline waste water from the desalination plant and receives treated sewage.

The two separate streams of liquid go through a number of chambers separated by semi-permeable membranes through which water molecules travel from the treated sewage

toward the salty water.

That process increases the volume, pressure and speed of the saline water flow, spinning a turbine that generates electricity before the now-diluted mixture is discharged to sea.

The 700-million-yen (\$4.4 million) power generation system came online last August, and once running at full capacity, it should generate up to 880,000 kilowatts annually, equivalent to the electricity consumption of 300 households.

However it will remain devoted to supplying the power-thirsty facility, although it covers just a tiny fraction of its energy needs.

### - Not 'a pipe dream' -

The engineers involved, however, are dreaming big.

The system will go through a five-year test to monitor its performance, including costs and maintenance,

particularly for the membrane and other parts exposed to salt.

Financial details of the project have not been disclosed, but engineers admitted that for now the system's power costs "a lot more" than either fossil fuel or renewable energy.

Pumping the water into the system also uses energy itself, and scaling up osmotic power for grid-level energy production has not yet been done anywhere in the world.

Still, officials and experts believe the power source has a future, noting that unlike solar and wind, it is not dependent on weather or light.

And the current high costs are partly because the company had to build a one-of-a-kind power plant, Ueyama said.

Osmotic power has often been seen as primarily useful for estuary areas, where freshwater river flows meet the salty ocean.

But Ueyama said the technique being used in Japan could be useful for countries with large desalination facilities like Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern nations.

Kyowakiden is also working on technology that could generate similar power levels from less salty regular seawater.

"First we want to popularise this technology from Fukuoka to the rest of Japan. In order for us to do that, we want to further upgrade our technology to create osmotic power generation that can use ordinary ocean water to generate electricity," he said.

"We don't think this is a pipe dream." □



# Believers rejoice as Jerusalem's holy sites re-open

**Jerusalem, Undefined**

Just before 5 am at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, a Muslim worshipper prayed in tears. A few hours later, similar emotion overcame Christians and Jews as the city's holy sites reopened following the truce with Iran.

Jerusalem's Old City contains major holy sites for all three Abrahamic religions, which had been shuttered since the start of the war sparked by the US-Israeli attack on Iran on February 28.

For the first time in 41 days, Muslim worshippers returned to Al-Aqsa Mosque, Jews to the Western Wall and Christians to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

At Al-Aqsa, Islam's third holiest site which was closed during most of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan this year, thousands of worshippers performed the ritual dawn prayer under a heavy police presence.

One man stood by the entrance of the Al-Qibli prayer hall, handing out paper tissues to worshippers overcome with emotion.

Suzan Allam, who came with her husband and daughter, told AFP the return to Al-Aqsa was like "a



**An Ethiopian Orthodox Christian worshipper prays at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the old city of Jerusalem on April 9, 2026.**

party".

Hamza al-Afghani, a young Palestinian, spoke of an "in-describable joy".

"Al-Aqsa mosque is Jerusalem's soul," another worshipper, who declined to share his name for security reasons, said.

Police began to disperse Muslim worshippers at 6:30 am in order to allow religious Jews to enter the compound, causing anger in the crowd.

Under long-standing arrangements, Jews may visit the compound which they

revere as the site of the first and second Jewish temples but they are not permitted to pray there.

Israel says it is committed to upholding this status quo, though Palestinians fear it is being eroded as some religious Jews increasingly break those rules to come and pray.

## - 'A miracle' -

A stone's throw away from Al-Aqsa, the same religious fervour was present as Christians celebrated mass at the Church of the Holy

Sepulchre, which encompasses the sites where Christians believe Jesus Christ was crucified, entombed and later resurrected.

Tears streamed from the eyes of Uwde Sliman, a 40-year-old Ethiopian draped in a white shawl, as she came out of the church.

"I don't have any words", she said apologetically and with a smile.

"It's been one month, it's very, very, very hard, but thank God we have life... all Christians are happy to-

day."

Imad Marcos was enthusiastic at the Church's opening, posing in front of the building first with sunglasses on and then off.

"I wasn't sure that it was going to be open. But when I came over, it was a miracle" said the US-Egyptian businessman, who makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem from Miami every year.

"I might travel tomorrow, not today. Because I will have to enjoy here the whole day," he said.

Father Andrea, who officiated mass on Thursday, was not surprised by the few worshippers present "in these difficult times".

"Little by little, we hope they'll come back", he said.

## - 'Like at home' -

At the Western Wall, dozens of Jewish worshippers prayed in the late morning. "I'm so happy to be able to come back. Here I feel at home," Ayla, 19, said.

Yehuda Bandel, a 70-year-old retired teacher living in a suburb of the coastal city of Tel Aviv, felt the same joy.

Bandel came with his entire family to celebrate his grandson's upcoming bar mitzvah, the Jewish coming-of-age ritual. □

# Mountain-made: Balkan sheepdog eyes future beyond the hills

**Republic of North Macedonia**

At a remote monastery in North Macedonia's rugged west, Father Porfirij starts his day by feeding his large black Karaman sheepdogs, a breed that has guarded highland flocks for centuries.

In February, the Karaman a hardy mountain shepherd won provisional recognition as an indigenous breed from the International Canine Federation (FCI).

The decision caps years of work by breeders, scientists and Porfirij himself to define and preserve one of the region's oldest breeds. "They are very nice dogs, very peaceful," the Orthodox priest told AFP, as

he dished out the morning meal to the thick-coated hounds at their home in the centuries-old monastery.

Rooted in nomadic herding traditions, the Karaman

is one of several breeds Balkan shepherds used to guard mountain-dwelling flocks against bears and wolves, a practice that dates back to Ottoman times.



**Father Porfirij plays with a Karaman dog at the Bigorski Monastery in Mavrovo i Rostuse on March 19, 2026.**

- 'Created by the mountain' -

For locals, the sheepdogs' symbolism is deeply important.

The more famous Yugoslavian Shepherd, also known as the Sharplanina or Sharr, even features on the country's currency.

But as rural populations decline across the region, the pastoral life that sustained the Karaman is fading, leaving just 2,000 of them registered in the country, according to Ilija Karov, who heads a kennel club devoted to the breed.

Official recognition as a distinct breed was important because it "opened the borders" for the animal to become a pet abroad and bolster breeding ef-

forts, Karov said.

It is also the first breed with its origins exclusively recognised in North Macedonia, with the Sharr shared with Serbia.

Porfirij was drawn to the campaign for the animal almost a decade ago, while living at the St Jovan Bigorski Monastery.

Using the monastic kennel as his base, the priest travelled through the mountains, collecting dogs with specific traits.

Although the Karaman is visually similar to the Sharr, scientists have found clear genetic and anatomical differences, which Karov says include its curled tail, lighter eyes and spoon-shaped paws. □



## Food culture in Aruba

(Oranjestad) – Like many other cultures, an important aspect of the Aruban cultural identity is our connection to food and food traditions. The local food traditions consist of a melting pot of different cultural and religious eating habits and dishes.

### Breakfast, lunch and dinner

The routine of breakfast, lunch and dinner on the island is one that does not completely follow a European or American routine, despite the major influences from these parts of the world on our culture and way of living. When it comes to the three important meals of the day, most of the Aruban population follows a Latin-American influenced routine.

### Breakfast

Breakfast in Aruba is quite simple: a cup of coffee or tea, some bread, and sometimes an egg. Sometimes, due to the need of a quick “to-go” breakfast, you may also find many snack trucks and cafes that sell sandwiches, pastechis (meat pie), arepas and empanadas early in the morning.

### Main Meal

The main meal is typically eaten in most households around noon or in the afternoon. This can consist of meat, fish, and chicken stewed or fried with funchi (polenta) or rice with stewed vegetables. Often, fried or boiled plantain or pan bati (Aruban pancake) is included. Stews are a staple in Aruban cuisine and can be largely influenced by Latin-American and Latin/Afro-Caribbean Stews. Some of the more unique stews and soups from the ABC Islands\* include sopi bonch'i rabo (red kidney bean soup with pig tail), sopi mondongo (tripe soup), carni stoba (beef stew), comcomber stoba (West Indian gherkin stew) and much more.

### Dinner Time

Dinner time can vary significantly from household to household. Unlike the U.S. or in Europe, dinner time typically does not consist of a whole (warm) meal. Instead, the evening “meal” can typically consist of something lighter, like a sandwich, though it is not uncommon to see leftovers from the main meal reheated and eaten again. Tea and coffee are often also served with the evening snack.

### (Religious) Holidays

Christmas is probably the biggest global holiday, and every culture has its own spin on what their Christmas cuisine entails. In Aruba, our Christmas cuisine is again largely based on Latin-American influences, most notably from Venezuela. Ayacas and the famous pan di ham\* are two crucial holiday dishes, along with stuffed turkey, roasted glazed ham topped with pineapples, arroz con pollo (rice and chicken) and potato salad, among other items. Traditional drinks include ponche crema (Aruban eggnog), chuculati pinda (hot chocolate with peanut butter), and homemade fruit punch. Desserts include bolo di pistachio (pistachio cake), bolo di cashupete (cashew cake), quesillo (flan), bolo preto (fruit cake), drigidek (gingerbread), pan boyo (bread cake) and more.

### Snacks and tasty delights

Besides meals and dishes that are eaten on the dinner table, Aruba also has a food tradition that includes snacks and other tasty delights that you may easily find around the island. These include, Saco\*, baskets, pastechi, kroket, deditos, Johnny cake and more. These snacks are usually sold at local snack



trucks and cafes, often located on the side of the road. In the area of Tanki Leendert and Tanki flip, for example, there are many of these trucks parked on the side of the road and often open until late at night offering tasty and filling snacks post night-life fun.

\*ABC Islands: Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao

\*Pan di ham: Derived from the Venezuelan Pan de Jamon (rolled up bread with ham, raisins and olives)

\*Saco: Saco literally means “bag”. Saco contains fried potatoes, plantains, chicken (and ribs) and a Johnny cake, served in a paper bag. □

**Source: Voeding, voedingsgewoonten en gerechten op Aruba (Nutrition, Food Traditions and Dishes on Aruba) by Biblioteca Nacional Aruba**

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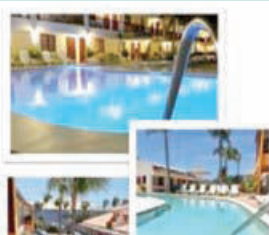
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**Toll Free Calls from the Netherlands:** 085-009-0218

**Office Hours: Monday – Friday: 8am-7pm. Saturday & Sunday: 9am-5pm.**

**Facebook:** @qualityapartments  
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## Conchi: Aruba's hidden natural pool



**(Oranjestad)—Amongst the countless beaches surrounding the island that are well-known and frequently visited, there is an additional “hidden” natural pools that is situated in the northern coast of the island, two ideal stops in your tour itinerary. This is Conchi.**

### Conchi (Natural Pool)

For many years, Conchi was the only natural pool that we had on the island. Located in the Arikok National Park, near Boca Keto and the Daimari Ranch, Conchi—also known “Cura di Turtuga (Turtle's Cove) or just Natural Pool—is reachable with any 4x4 vehicle or by foot if you're up for a long hike. However, since it is part of the National Park, you must first get permission from park management to enter. You would have to purchase a day pass, and receive a wristband as proof of payment. Once you've completed that, you are set!

If you decide to hike from the entrance of the Arikok National Park, this is also possible: do bring plenty of protective clothing and enough water and food—it could take you up to three hours to hike there!

However, when you eventually do get there, you will be greeted with crystal blue water surrounded by a natural rock formation that protects you from the wild waves on the other side. Though the pool is located on the northern side of the island (where the sea is largely rough and largely no suitable for swimming), the pool itself is very calm. It's also relatively deep, and you can climb up the rocks and jump in!

Fun fact: “Conchi” means small bowl in Papiamentu. Once you get there, you may see why we call it that. ☐



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## Beaches for the whole family to enjoy!

(Oranjestad)—One of the biggest concerns that parents have when traveling with their children is a guarantee of their safety and healthy enjoyment. Therefore, we thought it would be a great help to traveling parents to list off some the most family-friendly beaches around the island.

### Baby Beach in San Nicolas

Baby Beach is one Aruba's most popular and visited beaches, and for good reason: This sandy and quiet lagoon is a great place for parents to sit back and relax while their children play in the shallow shores of the beach. Beside the relaxing atmosphere, there are also several services that may accommodate your stay, like a parking lot, sun tent rentals, chairs, bathrooms and a snack bar right at the far left of the beach.

### Mangel Halto in Pos Chiquito

Mangel Halto is situated

in the back streets of Pos Chiquito. Though there are several stairs on the sides of the beach cliff leading you down, the best spot for families to hang out is across the bridge, passed the mangrove trees near the entrance sign. Here, there are small and big palapas, perfect for big and small families to set up their belongings. In this area, the shore is also shallow, falling right around your knee before slowly getting deeper: perfect for kids to safely play.

### Eagle Beach/Palm Beach

Yet another highly popular beach sites, Eagle Beach and Palm Beach is where most of our visitors go to tan, swim or play in the white sand. Because they are near the low-rise and high-rise hotel areas, these beaches are the most accessible for visitors on foot. These beaches also offer many palapas free to use, but you can also rent chairs

and tents. Much like Baby Beach, these sites are one of the best beaches for your children to play and build sand castles.

### Boca Catalina in Malmok

Boca Catalina is a small bay beach near the Malmok beach area further down the hotel areas. Though it may not be a very sandy beach, it is relatively quiet and tranquil. This is a great

place for family to lay down a big blanket and have a little picnic. This is also one of the best places to snorkel, as this area is filled with little fish and corals, even close to the shore. □



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**JOIA** | **ZIMA**  
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## The legend of the Kibrahacha tree

**ORANJESTAD—The Kibrahacha is a famous tree known locally for its bright, yellow flowers that blooms for just three days. Scientifically known as *Tabebuia billbergii*, and in English as the Yellow Poui, this tree is native to the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao, and is considered among locals as one of the most spectacular trees on the island. But did you also know that the beautiful yellow flowers have a story behind them?**

The Kibrahacha is said to have extremely hard wood—so hard that it can break an axe. In fact, that's what its name means in Papiamentu: "kibra" (break) "hacha" (axe). The flowers bloom around April and May, but this only last for

about three days, as the flowers start to fall off and the tree starts growing its green leaves. The Kibrahacha is especially particular, as it's the only one among its neighboring trees to starts blooming first.

### The legend of the Kibrahacha

*Written by Hubert (Lio Booi)*

One day Aterima, who lived west of the hill Sero Warawara, woke up one day to find her father sleeping in his hammock, suffering a bout of terrible fever. Her mother was very worried, and as was the custom in the olden days, asked Aterima to go fetch Kudawechea, who was a epistemophile, to come see his father.

Aterima wasted to time and went to go fetch Kudawechea. Upon telling Kudawechea that her father was sick, he immediately accompanied Aterima back to her hut, where he encountered her father in a bad state. Not willing to waste any time, he told Aterima that the only thing that can cure her father is a home-made potion made out of the Kibrahacha flower. At the time the Kibrahacha was not yet in her blooming season, but the stubborn Kudawechea was determined to bring back Aterima's father back to health, and so off they went to the nearest Kibrahacha tree.

When they arrived at the tree, they saw that it was covered head to toe in

thorns, with only a few closed flowers at the very top. Kudawechea, experienced veteran in all things Aruban flora and fauna, told Aterima to start plucking the thorns of the tree to climb to the top where the flowers are. Aterima, just as determined to save her father, didn't hesitate to start. To her surprise, every time she plucked a thorn of the tree, a bright, yellow flower bloomed in its place. The thorns were hard to pluck out, but Aterima continued plucking with enthusiasm and wonder at the unfolding sight before her. Not too long after she was able to fill her entire satchel with the yellow flowers.

Kudawechea, satisfied to see Aterima so happy and encouraged to help her father, took her back to her hut.

Upon arriving back at the hut, Aterima's mother quickly made a tea out of



the flowers and gave it to her sick husband. Miraculously, after just one sip of the tea, the father's fever left his body immediately, and he opened eyes and sprung up feeling new.

The next morning, they all visited the same Kibrahacha tree that saved the life of Aterima's father and they saw another miracle. The tree was covered again in the same bright, yellow flowers, with not a thorn in sight. And as the legend goes, from that day on, the Kibrahacha tree no longer produced any more thorns. □

Where dinner ends,  
the night begins

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JOIA  
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## Fun facts about the "transhi" hedges!



**(Oranjestad)—When off-roading, you may encounter some houses that have rock hedges, aligned perfectly and held together by cement—or sometimes nothing at all.**

These hedges are called "transhi," and have a historical and cultural meaning on the island. Used by cunukeros\* around the island back when agriculture played a more dominant role in day-to-day life and survival, these stone hedges represent the resilience of our great-grand parents, who had to make do with what nature gave them. These stone structures are traditionally placed carefully on top of each other. No cement or other binding mixture was used to hold the structure together. Though not commonly used for modern homes, the few structures that remain around the island stood the test of time, some completely intact even after decades of rain, wind and urbanization. These stone hedges are a representation of the Aruba's unique farming culture—which valued durability, sustainability and resilience.

\*cunukero: Aruban farmers. □

Pictures extracted from the 'Plantage Zorg en Hoop' collection on [Coleccion.aw](https://coleccion.aw)



# The Aruban Cunukero: From past to present

(Oranjestad)—Aruba's culture consists of rich historical traditions that make up the Aruban identity and lifestyle. However, the life of the cunukero (farmer) is perhaps the most important aspect of our culture, in a sense representing to locals the true essence of the Aruban.

Historically, cunucus (farms) played a huge role in the early social and economic development of Aruba, and its relevance dates back to the early days of the colonization era. Upon being discovered by Spanish conquistadors in the late 15th century, Aruba was used primarily as a ranch, housing horses and cattle brought from Europe. During the Dutch colonization era where the West Indian Company (WIC) dominated the economic sphere on the island, using the land to set up cattle farms and ranches remained popular.

Anthropologist Sidney Mintz divided Caribbean farmers back in four categories:

- The "squatters", who were mostly comprised of illegal and poor colonists, runaway slaves and deserters who took advantage of the Spanish's weak supervision on Caribbean islands like Cuba and the DR;
- Then you have "Early Yeomen", who were legal farmers who came to the west under contract. Once their contract expired, they were given a plot of land for independent use;
- Proto-Peasants were plantation slaves who were allowed to have a small piece of land to grow food for their own consumption. This was to curb the cost of living on the plantations;
- Lastly you have the "Runaway Peasantries", usually comprised of runaway slaves who acquired farming tools and cattle through stealing or through secret exchanges with other slaves from different plantations.

However, the Aruban cunukeros back then are hard to place, and their history may explain why.

From 1636 (beginning of Dutch colonization era) to before the oil industry in 1924, Aruba's population consisted of mostly farmers. These farmers were mostly indigenous and were characterized as peasants. They weren't allowed to participate in trading, but instead were granted a piece of land to live off of. However, in exchange



for this grant, these indigenous farmers were obligated to work for the WIC, doing daily tasks such as taking care of or hunting cattle large majority of which were destined for Curacao, clean water tanks and chop wood, among other things.

As much as these farmers were given to opportunity to live "free" with a plot of land, their exclusion from the trading and business world, as well as being deprived the chance to become real property and cattle owners, made them a unique group among Caribbean farmers at the time.

The WIC placed a lot of restrictions on these indigenous farmers a method to safeguard their cattle deposit on the island. The indigenous farmers were mostly granted less than 7 acres of land. Those who owned bigger land were either once affiliated with the WIC or were colonists who settled on the island to try their luck at farming. In 1767, there were about 120 houses/cunucus on the island.

These Aruban farmers were also limited to the amount of cattle they could keep. Most kept goats as cattle, as only those who were affiliated with the WIC could keep (more) sheep. Of the 76 goat herders on the island, about 45 of them had less than 30 goats, and only 7 of them had more than 60 goats.

It wasn't until the WIC was defunct in late 18th century that these farmers were able to obtain more freedom as cunukeros. After 1824, the government gave these farmers official permission to keep livestock, and the obligations once placed on them were officially discarded.

Because of the dry climate in Aruba, growing food for commercial purposes was not popular. The focus was mainly on cattle herding and taking care of livestock. However, livestock need food to survive, and when Aruba experienced its duper dry climate, many farmers would see a big loss in their livestock, and hence profit.

Although the WIC at one point did try to come up with an initiative to get more people to have land on the island, the climate never really allowed real profit from farming. Because of the climate, Aruban farmers in general could not keep large quantities of livestock. At a certain point toward the end of the 18th century, the climate got so bad that many farmers decided to leave the island for a while.

For this reason, the farming economy on the island remained small. As the years went by and people noticed that these farms could not really produce any sustainable profit, farmers kept their small piece of land just to live off of. This is why the Aruban cunukeros only played

a very tiny role into the plantation economy.

In modern Aruba, cunucus and cunukeros still exist on the island, fortunately with more freedom and more opportunity to tap into the agricultural market. These farmers usually sell their produce on a smaller scale, like during farmers' market events and other types of (holiday) events. □

**Source: "Arubaans Akkoord: Opstellen over Aruba van voor de komst van de olieindustrie (Aruban Accord: Essays on Aruba Before the Arrival of the Oil Industry)" by Alofs, Luc; Rutgers, Wim; Coomans, Henny E. red.**

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## CROSSWORD

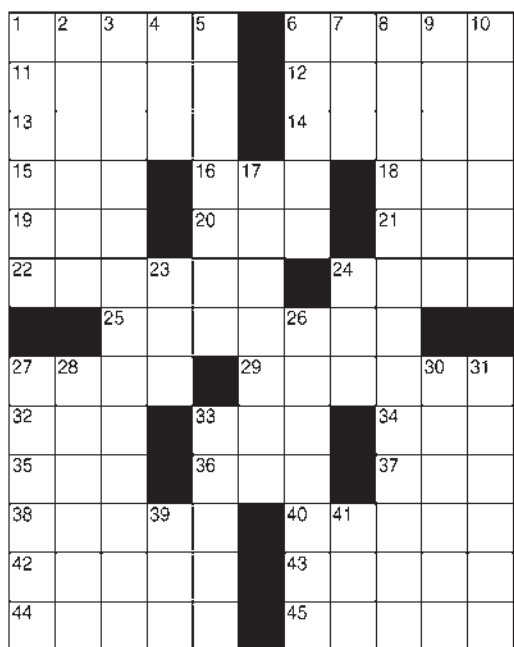
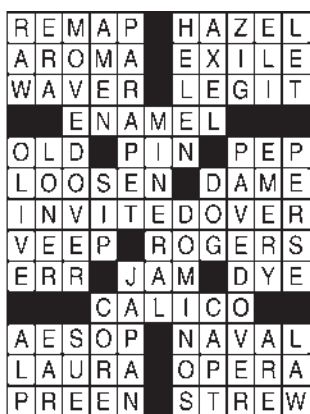
By THOMAS JOSEPH

### ACROSS

- 1 Pottery piece  
6 Dentist's directive  
11 State game  
12 Western spread  
13 Devoured  
14 Spare  
15 "That's gross!"  
16 Really impress  
18 That fellow  
19 Make a bow in  
20 Wee bit  
21 Aussie runner  
22 "The Scarlet Letter" name  
24 Pharaoh symbols  
25 Freud's home  
27 Idiotic  
29 Carpentry tool  
32 Genesis name  
33 Bashful pal  
34 Historic time  
35 Director's cry  
36 Historic time

### DOWN

- 37 Birdie beater  
38 Suspect's story  
40 Stop  
42 Debussy work  
43 Brat's opposite  
44 Squalid  
45 Slender  
8 In agreement  
9 Pinch pennies  
10 Gumshoe  
17 Disney's Pumbaa, e.g.  
23 Rickety boat  
24 Target  
26 Indy auto  
27 Model stickers  
28 Throat dangles  
30 Made blank  
31 Almost never  
33 Supermarket section  
39 Sleep site  
41 Hydrocarbon suffix



4-21

A XYDLBAA XR  
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

### 4-21 CRYPTOQUOTE

X J B C W R N N M C , B C W D L

T X H C X L D B N K T Y N J

W N F J N K U X L Q X T T A M X N L .

— L N D F W R N F M O E

**Cryptoquote:** NOTHING WILL TURN  
A MAN'S HOME INTO A CASTLE MORE QUICKLY  
AND EFFECTIVELY THAN A DACHSHUND. —  
QUEEN VICTORIA

## Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic—but important—information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.

### Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.

### Drinking water



The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the

store.

### Supermarket hours

Supermarket hours may vary depending on where you are staying on the island. Generally though, most supermarkets are open from 8am to 9 or 10pm, Monday through Saturday. On Sundays, supermarkets generally close earlier; mostly around 2pm.

### Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as

the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourist that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occurs, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.



| CRUISE SHIP SCHEDULE |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 07<br>TUE            | <b>OASIS OF THE SEA</b><br>Arrival: 8:00   Departure: 23:00   Berth: I                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 08<br>WED            | <b>REGAL PRINCESS</b><br>Arrival: 7:00   Departure: 16:00   Berth: B<br><b>SERENADE OF THE SEAS</b><br>Arrival: 8:00   Departure: 23:00   Berth: C<br><b>CARNIVAL MAGIC</b><br>Arrival: 9:00   Departure: 22:00   Berth: I<br><b>FREEWINDS</b><br>Arrival: 6:00   Departure: ****   Berth: E |
| 09<br>THU            | <b>OCEANIA INSIGNIA</b><br>Arrival: 7:00   Departure: 20:00   Berth: B<br><b>CELEBRITY SILHOUETTE</b><br>Arrival: 8:00   Departure: 20:00   Berth: C<br><b>GRAND PRINCESS</b><br>Arrival: 8:00   Departure: 22:00   Berth: I                                                                 |
| 10<br>FRI            | <b>NORWEGIAN JEWEL</b><br>Arrival: 11:00   Departure: 20:00   Berth: C                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 12<br>SUN            | <b>FREEWINDS [Departure]</b><br>Arrival: ****   Departure: 22:30   Berth: E                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

## SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

### King Classic Sudoku



Difficulty: ★★★★★

4/10

### Answer to previous puzzle

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 2 | 7 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 1 |
| 9 | 1 | 8 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 5 | 3 |
| 3 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 4 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 5 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| 1 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 9 |
| 5 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 1 | 6 |
| 8 | 9 | 1 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 9 | 1 | 4 | 8 |
| 2 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 9 | 7 |

Difficulty: ★★★

4/9



# Waiting for DeepSeek: new model to test China's AI ambitions

## Tokyo, Japan

For weeks now, the global tech industry has been waiting for a major artificial intelligence launch from DeepSeek, seen as a benchmark for China's progress in the fast-moving field.

More than a year has passed since the startup put Chinese AI on the map in early 2025 with a low-cost chatbot that performed at a similar level to US rivals. But despite reports and rumours about its imminent release, DeepSeek's next-generation "V4" model is nowhere in sight.

Speculation is also swirling over the geopolitical implications of which computer chips were chosen to train and power the new system: world-leading US designs or made-in-China alternatives that the country is racing to develop.

"It's important to know because at one level, it is a signal of China's AI self-sufficiency trajectory," Wei Sun, principal AI analyst at Counterpoint Research, told AFP.

Tech news outlet The Information reported last week that V4 can be run on the latest chips made by China's Huawei.

Such a shift would mark a milestone for China in its bid to beat US restrictions



This file photo illustration shows the DeepSeek app on a mobile phone in Hong Kong on January 28, 2025.

on the export of top-of-the-range AI chips from Californian titan Nvidia to the country.

The report cited five people with direct knowledge of large orders for Huawei chips, made in preparation for the DeepSeek launch by tech giants including Alibaba, ByteDance and Tencent.

AFP contacted DeepSeek, Huawei, Alibaba, ByteDance and Tencent but none were able to comment.

### - 'Wake-up call' -

DeepSeek started life in 2023 as a side project of a hedge fund that had access to a cache of powerful Nvidia processors. It shot to attention in January 2025 with its R1 deep-reasoning chatbot, which sent US tech shares tumbling with President Donald

Trump calling it a "wake-up call" for American firms. R1 was based on DeepSeek's last major AI model, V3, which was released in December 2024.

The company's affordable, customisable AI tools have been widely adopted in China, and are also popular in emerging markets such as Southeast Asia and the Middle East. □



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## HEALTH

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#### San Nicolas

Imsan 24 hours  
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Oduber: Tel.582 1780

#### San Nicolas:

Seroe Preto: Tel.584 4833

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Walk-In Doctor's Clinic  
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Noord 527 3200  
Sta. Cruz 527 2900  
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Ambulancia 911  
Fire Dept. 115  
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Prof. Taxi 588 0035  
Taxi D.T.S. 587 2300  
Taxi Serv. Aruba 583 3232  
A1 Taxi Serv. 280 2828

### TRAVEL INFO

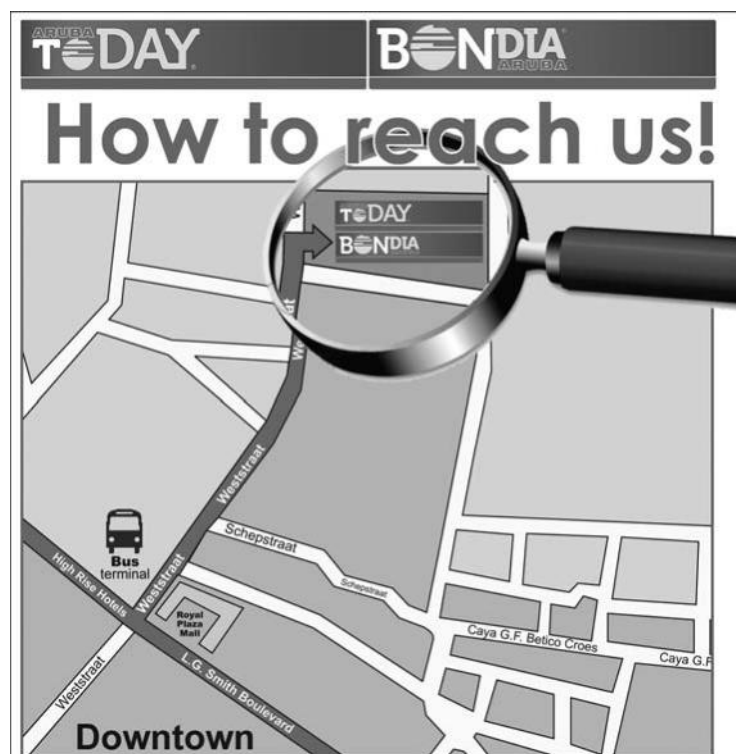
Aruba Airport 524 2424  
American Airlines 582 2700  
Avianca 588 0059  
Jet Blue 588 2244  
Surinam 582 7896

### AID FOUNDATIONS

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FAVI- Visually Impaired  
Tel. 582 5051  
Alcoholics Anonymous  
Tel. 736 2952  
Narcotics Anonymous  
Tel. 583 8989  
Fundacion Contra Violencia  
Relacional Tel. 583 5400  
Centre for Diabetes  
Tel. 524 8888  
Child Abuse Prevention  
Tel. 582 4433  
Quota Club Tel. 525 2672

### General Info

Phone Directory Tel. 118





## Cannes Festival promises escapism in Hollywood-lite edition

### Paris, France

The Cannes Film Festival unveiled its roster of films for this year's edition on Thursday packed with historical dramas, "gentleness" and even football, but with big Hollywood studios notable in their absence.

Festival director Thierry Fremaux unveiled 21 films in competition for the main Palme d'Or prize, featuring former winners, newcomers and strong showings from Spain and Japan.

Frontrunners for the top prize will include Japan's Hirokazu Kore-eda with AI-themed "Sheep in the Box", Cristian Mungiu from Romania with "Fjord", and Russian auteur Andrey Zvyagintsev, whose film "Mino-taur" focuses on wealthy Russians confronted with conscription.

Spanish veteran and Cannes favourite Pedro Almodovar will appear for the seventh time with his "Amarga Navidad" ("Bitter Christmas"), while exiled Oscar winner Asghar Farhadi will represent Iran with "Histoires Paralleles" ("Parallel Tales").

Commenting on the selection for the May 12-23 festival, Fremaux said many Western films would be a form of escapism from the grim reality of current affairs, with a focus on "gentleness, songs, nature",



**Cannes film festival General Delegate Thierry Fremaux (L) and Festival President Iris Knobloch pose after a press conference to announce the official selection of the 79th edition of the Cannes Film Festival, at the Pathe Palace cinema in Paris on April 9, 2026.**

while others were "bringing history into the present".

Introducing the French film "Quelques Mots d'Amour" ("A Few Love Words") by Rudi Rosenberg, he quipped: "You see? We all need some love and gentleness."

Around 2,500 films were submitted for selection in total, which Fremaux said underlined the vitality of the cinema industry, which is struggling with viewers switching to streaming and home entertainment.

### - Hollywood -

Out of competition, there

will be a surprising amount of football at the high temple of French cinema, with documentaries about legendary forward Eric Cantona and the notorious England-Argentina 1986 World Cup match featuring Diego Maradona.

American A-listers will be less prominent than usual, although Woody Harrelson and Kristen Stewart are set to star in the Paris-set "Full Phil" by French director Quentin Dupieux.

"The United States will be represented. The (Hollywood) studios a bit less," Fremaux said, while recall-

ing the world premieres of "Top Gun: Maverick" and the last edition of "Mission: Impossible" in previous editions. Tom Cruise arrived on the red carpet by helicopter in 2022 as eight French fighter jets flew overhead. Some industry insiders have speculated that Hollywood majors are spurning European festivals as platforms for their film premieres, preferring their own social media-led launches as less risky options.

Plane-mad US movie legend John Travolta will bring some serious stardust to Cannes when he pres-

ents his directorial debut, "Propeller One-Way Night Coach", about a young boy's journey in the "golden age of aviation".

Hollywood and Broadway legend Barbra Streisand will also be on Cannes' famed waterfront to receive the festival's Honorary Palme d'Or, as will New Zealand filmmaker Peter Jackson, best known for "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

American director Steven Soderbergh will present a documentary on John Lennon, titled "The Last Interview".

### - Politics -

Last year's Cannes, like other European festivals in Berlin and Venice in previous years, was the scene of fierce wrangling about whether the industry and organisers should take a stronger stand on Israel's devastation of Gaza.

Hundreds of film figures, including "Schindler's List" actor Ralph Fiennes and Richard Gere, denounced "genocide" in the territory in an open letter released on the eve of the event.

The Berlin Film Festival in February found itself at the centre of a storm after jury president Wim Wenders, when asked about the German government's support for Israel, replied: "We cannot really enter the field of politics." □

## Dutch minister says not planning to bar Kanye West

### The Hague, Netherlands

There are no plans as yet to bar the rapper Kanye West, also known as Ye, from the Netherlands, a minister said Wednesday after Britain banned him over past antisemitic outbursts.

Dutch Asylum and Migration Minister Bart van den Brink said there needed to be a possible danger to public order or risk to national security to bar someone from entering the country. "Once I have such information, I will proceed accordingly. Based on what is currently known to me, I have no indication

that an entry ban can be applied in this case," said the minister in a statement

sent to AFP.

Ye is due to perform shows in the Netherlands on June

6 and 8.

On Wednesday, the U.K. government said it would not allow him into the country, prompting organisers of a festival he was to headline to cancel the July event.

The disgraced rapper had submitted an application to travel to Britain, but it was refused on the grounds his presence would not be conducive to the public good, a UK government source confirmed.

West, who last performed in Britain when he headlined the Glastonbury festival in 2015, has been heavily criticised for making antisemitic remarks and

voicing admiration for Adolf Hitler.

In May 2025, he released a song called "Heil Hitler", months after advertising a swastika t-shirt for sale on his website.

The song was banned by major streaming platforms. The U.S. rapper subsequently expressed regret for his conduct, blaming it on his bipolar disorder.

West's European comeback tour had already proved contentious prior to the furore in Britain.

In France, the mayor of Marseille said the rapper was "not welcome" for a concert planned there in June. □



**U.S. rapper and producer Kanye West waves after arriving at Shanghai Pudong International Airport on July 11, 2025. Kanye West will hold a concert in Shanghai on July 12.**



## NBA champion Thunder clinch Western Conference top seed

### Los Angeles, United States

The Oklahoma City Thunder secured the Western Conference top seed and best record in the NBA with a 128-110 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers on Wednesday.

Center Chet Holmgren poured in 30 points and pulled down 14 rebounds, and NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander added 20 points and 11 assists for the reigning champion Thunder, who notched a seventh straight victory to improve to 64-16 with two games left in the regular season.

Oklahoma City snagged the West's top seed for the third year running, and with the best overall record they'll have home court advantage throughout the playoffs.

"It's extremely important," said Holmgren, who added five assists, two steals and four blocked shots. "Just knowing that in the event of a game seven it's always going to be at home. We saw that in the playoffs last year twice, so it's extremely important."

"It's great to see that the hard work has paid off in one way, and now we've got more to do," Holmgren added. OKC's win means



**Shai Gilgeous-Alexander #2 of the Oklahoma City Thunder and Kawhi Leonard #2 of the Los Angeles Clippers vie for the ball during the first half of an NBA game at Intuit Dome on April 08, 2026 in Inglewood, California.**

the surging San Antonio Spurs are locked into the second seed in the West. San Antonio cruised past the Portland Trail Blazers 112-101 despite the absence of superstar Victor Wembanyama who sat out with a bruised rib and Stephon Castle.

De'Aaron Fox scored 25 points to lead a balanced Spurs attack. Keldon Johnson scored 20 points off the bench and rookie reserve Carter Bryant contributed

17.

The Denver Nuggets tightened their grip on third place in the West, beating the Memphis Grizzlies 136-119 behind a triple-double of 14 points, 16 rebounds and 10 assists from Nikola Jokic.

Three-time MVP Jokic posted his 34th triple-double of the season, the 198th of his career, to help Denver win their 10th straight their first double-digit win streak of

his tenure.

Jamal Murray scored 26 points to lead eight Nuggets players to score in double figures as Denver edged further ahead of the injury-hit Los Angeles Lakers for the third seed.

Eastern Conference top seeds Detroit welcomed star guard Cade Cunningham back to action with a 137-111 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks.

Cunningham, who had missed 11 games with a

collapsed lung, scored 13 points and handed out 10 assists in just under 26 minutes on court.

Jalen Duren scored 21 points to lead the Pistons, who had seven players score in double figures.

The Pistons have locked up the top seed and home court advantage throughout the Eastern Conference playoffs, but coach J.B. Bickerstaff said the return of Cunningham and teammate Isaiah Stewart, sidelined since March 13 with a calf strain, was a welcome opportunity to build their fitness before the playoffs start on April 18.

"There is no way to replicate NBA basketball," Bickerstaff said.

### - Cavs hold off Hawks -

In Cleveland, Donovan Mitchell scored 31 points, Evan Mobley added 22 points and 19 rebounds and James Harden chipped in 21 points as the Cavaliers held off the Atlanta Hawks 122-116, denying the Hawks' bid to clinch a playoff berth.

The Cavs, who notched a fourth straight win, are assured of a top-four seed in the East and are chasing the New York Knicks for third. □

## Sinner and Alcaraz wobble but advance to Monte Carlo quarter-finals

### Monaco, Principality of Monaco

Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz both suffered second-set stumbles on Thursday in their race for the number one ranking but recovered to reach the last eight of the Monte Carlo Masters.

Sinner, who said he ran out of steam in the second set, beat the wildly erratic Tomas Machac, 6-1, 6-7 (3/7), 6-3.

Alcaraz followed Sinner on to the centre court and his match went to a similar pattern before he beat Tomas Etcheverry 6-1, 4-6, 6-3.

Alcaraz, the defending champion, could lose the No.1 ranking to Sinner, who was finishing a ban last year and has no ranking points to lose this week.

The Italian came into Monaco after winning the Masters tournaments in Indian Wells and Miami.

On Thursday, Sinner galloped through the first set but slowed in the second, allowing Machac to hit his way back into the match. "I was struggling a little bit, was a bit tired," Sinner said. "I felt great before the match, in the second set I struggled a bit with trying to find the right energy. This can happen. I tried to push myself through which I've done."

Machac squandered two set points on serve at 5-4 in the second but then romped through the tie-break.

That ended Sinner's record streak of 36 straight sets in 1000-level events but he stayed cool to stretch his

run of Masters wins to 19.

Even with his opponent struggling, the Czech kept flailing for winners. He handed Sinner the third-set initiative when wild hitting handed the Italian a break to love in the third game. Sinner held serve twice before breaking to love to wrap up victory in two hours and one minute.

His quarter-final opponent, sixth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime, needed to expend less energy. The Canadian was leading Casper Ruud 7-5, 2-2 when the Norwegian retired.

"I hope I can recover as much as I can for tomorrow," said Sinner.

Alcaraz also blazed through the first set.

"I was hitting the ball really well in the first set, like ten

out of ten," said the Spaniard. But in the second he made 23 unforced errors.

"I had the chance to

break his serve in the second set and I didn't take it and every time you don't take the opportunities at this level you have to run back," said Alcaraz. □



**Spain's Carlos Alcaraz serves to Argentina's Tomas Martin Etcheverry during their Monte Carlo ATP Masters Series Tournament round of 16 tennis match on Court Rainier III at the Monte-Carlo Country Club in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, south-eastern France on April 9, 2026.**





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## Mclroy's back-nine birdie run grabs share of Masters lead

### Augusta, United States

Rory Mclroy reeled off three consecutive back-nine birdies to fire a five-under par 67 and seize a share of the lead in Thursday's opening round of the 90th Masters with top-ranked Scottie Scheffler lurking two adrift.

World number two Mclroy, trying to become only the fourth golfer to win back-to-back Masters titles, curled in a 29-foot birdie putt at the par-five 15th and parred in from there to match Sam Burns atop the leaderboard at Augusta National.

The five-time major champion from Northern Ireland pitched to three feet and tapped in for birdie at the par-five second hole but left a nine-foot par putt hanging on the edge to bogey the third.

Mclroy answered with a tap-in birdie at the eighth after reaching the green in two then made an eight-foot birdie putt at the ninth.

He charged to the top with a 14-foot birdie putt at the par-five 13th, a seven-foot birdie putt at the par-four 14th and his impressive putt at 15.

Mclroy found a fairway

bunker off the 18th tee but landed his approach 41 feet from the hole and two-putted.

Not since Jordan Spieth in 2016 has a defending champion led after the opening

round of the Masters.

Burns, seeking his first major win, made three birdies in four holes on the back nine. "I drove it really nice," Burns said. "You can get in some pretty tough spots getting off the fairway. Getting onto

the green, I felt like I was able to give myself some opportunities."

Burns was the 54-hole leader in last year's US Open before a closing 78 left him sharing seventh, his best major result.

He made an 11-foot eagle putt at the par-five second, answered a bogey at the par-three sixth with a birdie on the par-five eighth, then added a 20-foot birdie putt at the par-three 12th and an 11-foot birdie putt at 13 before driving the green in two at 15 to set up a four-foot birdie putt.

Americans Patrick Reed, the 2018 Masters champion, and Kurt Kitayama joined Australian Jason Day in the clubhouse on 69.

On the course at three-under were England's Justin Rose and four-time major winner Scheffler, seeking a third Masters crown in five seasons. □



Rory Mclroy of Northern Ireland lines up a putt on the first green during the first round of the 2026 Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club on April 09, 2026 in Augusta, Georgia.